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ESSAY  
ON  
THE DISORDERS INCIDENT TO  
LITERARY MEN:  
AND ON  
THE BEST MEANS  
OF  
PRESERVING THEIR HEALTH.

READ BEFORE THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF LITERATURE, NOV. 5, 1834;

AND DEDICATED, BY PERMISSION,  
TO THE LORD BISHOP OF SALISBURY.

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BY W. NEWNHAM, Esq. M.R.S.L.

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TO THE RIGHT REVEREND  
THOMAS, LORD BISHOP OF SALISBURY,

*&c, &c.*

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MY LORD,

IN dedicating to your Lordship the few following pages, I am deeply sensible of the privilege of private friendship ; and I feel that there is a peculiar fitness in inscribing them to *you*, as the first President of the Royal Society of Literature—as the distinguished friend of literary merit—and as yourself, one of the most remarkable living examples of intellectual industry and research.

I have the honour to be,

MY LORD,

Your Lordship's obedient Servant,

THE AUTHOR.

*Farnham, 18th December, 1835.*

*By the same Author,*

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## A N E S S A Y, &c.

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THE preservation of health, the prolongation of life, and the consequent useful employment of these valuable possessions, entrusted to man for the purpose of being devoted to the real happiness and welfare of himself, and his fellow-men, and to the honour of his Maker, form an object of value, great in proportion to the power of usefulness on the one hand, and to the capacity for exhibiting a portrait of social virtue, through the influence of reason and religion over the individual character, on the other.

Hence is to be inferred the great importance of attention to the health of literary persons, who pre-eminently occupy this station in society, and who are, therefore, the more deeply responsible for their example. For it is a fact, that the execution of the best intentions is oftentimes precluded by the want of physical health; or by

that irritable state of the nervous system which is a consequence of physical disorder, the result of over-excitement of the brain. Or, just as the character is reaching the maturity of its power, it is destroyed by premature disease; and its promise of abundant fruitfulness is forfeited to undue exertion, and exchanged for the unbroken silence of the grave, or for the cheerless cell of insanity.

With these views, it has been thought that some few practical observations on the disorders incident to literary men, and on the best means of their prevention, would not be uninteresting to the Royal Society of Literature.

It may be assumed as a principle, that, for the most part, *organic disease* is the result of *frequently reiterated functional disorder*; and this *disorder* may not have been characterized by the symptoms of acute malady, but *may*, and *often does* consist in over-excitement, in simply calling upon the organ for more action than it is capable of sustaining without injury to itself, or to the harmony of vital function generally.

Under common circumstances, disorder of function arises in the over-stimulated organ: and,



in proportion to its importance in the animal economy ; and to the intimacy or remoteness of its connexion, and of its sympathies with other organs, the general health becomes impaired.

Where that over-stimulated organ is the brain, it is manifest that its disorders are important, because of the situation which it holds in itself ; and that they become all-important from this consideration—that *every* organ and function is dependent for its entireness upon receiving a due supply of nervous influence, which it *cannot* receive, if the brain be inordinately devoted to intellectual pursuits ; and yet, *without which it must fail*, and *the general health must suffer*.

This is precisely the situation of men devoted to literary pursuits ; their brain is over-stimulated, and the several organs and functions suffer in consequence. It is often thought that digestion is impaired by the *sedentary life* of close students ; but the real cause of suffering is, that the nutritive system is deprived of its due proportion of nervous energy, and hence digestion is enfeebled. Our *first* object of attention, therefore, is the *brain* ; our *second*, the *organs dependent upon it for support*.

Another consideration which should be noticed in this place, is, that the brain has its natural period of *rest*—the night ; during which it should recruit itself, and accumulate its nervous energy for next day's expenditure : then, if the quantity of nervous influence (or the power of producing it without effort) accumulated during the night, be *precisely equal* to the *expenditure of the day*, all is well, and the harmony of the functions is undisturbed. But if too much nervous energy be expended through the *intellectual* brain, there will be a want of fresh and abundant supplies to the organs of *interior* life, *before* the hour of recruiting arrives : and then the constitution must suffer frightfully ; since it is only by a fearful demand upon its resources that it can carry on the functions of life at all : and this produces, first, loss of the balance of power ; then, disorder of function ; and, afterwards, organic disease, unless timely remedied. Reasoning *a priori*, therefore, would lead us to direct our chief attention to the brain of literary men, as the organ overworked in the history of their lives, to trace their disorders for the most part to this origin, and thence to work out our indications for the preservation of their health.



To take a proof of this position from experience, look for one moment to the daily labourer, and compare the amount of *his* expenditure of nervous energy in *his twelve hours' toil*, with that of the *literary man in his closet*. Why, really, the ratio is so dissimilar, so little in the one, so great in the other; so beneficial in the former, (since it actually develops muscular fibre,) so unmixedly injurious and exhausting in the latter, that we cannot wonder at the result:—the one enjoys health, strength, nutrition, freedom from care; the other is exhausted, has no stamina, is badly nourished, dyspeptic, and wretched.

This difference does not arise from the active life of the one, and the sedentary habits of the other, but from the *mode of expenditure of nervous energy*; the former increasing physical power, the latter, constantly impairing animal and vital function.

Again, the disorders of the labourer consist, for the most part, in malady of high action: while *torpor*, and that too affecting chiefly the cerebrum, and, *through it*, the chylopoietic system, forms the prominent characteristic of the disorders of literary men.

Genius and insanity are very nearly allied : and all the varied forms of hypochondriasis, all the miseries of disturbed sleep, all the nightmare, the visions, the ghosts, the irritability of temperament, attaching to the “*genus irritabile vatum*,” arise from over-worked brain, and form the sad inheritance of those who devote themselves to the pursuit of knowledge.

Let it be very particularly remembered, that the disorders of literary men are mainly characterized by TORPOR, arising from the exhaustion of an overstrained organ. The brain is called upon for too much exertion ; irritation, and an undue supply of arterial blood, in order to support this excessive action, are the consequence. These go on, the patient feeling uncomfortable, but seldom taking notice of his waning health, till the nervous energy has become enfeebled ; the veins refuse to return this inordinate supply of blood ; and congestion in the vascular system, as well as a diminished tension of the nervous fibre, are the consequence.

These facts should never be lost *sight* of in the treatment of the disorders of literary persons. They do not bear depletion well ; and *whenever*

*necessary*, it should be carried only to such an extent as just to relieve the loss of vascular balance, without endangering *much excitement*, or enfeebling the power of producing *just so much reaction* as may be beneficial to the system generally.

The life of the literary man may be divided into *his pursuit* after scientific knowledge, *his appropriation* to himself of that which is already known, and *the elaboration* of that which is only dimly seen, through the medium of much thought; processes analogous with those of mastication, digestion, and nutrition. It is in the last of these processes that the chief danger consists:—it is here that he is compelled to apply the fullest energy of organic life upon his one favourite object; and it is well if that organic life be so firmly constituted, as to bear with impunity such a demand upon its resources.

It will also be remarked, that some individuals differ very much from others in their aptitude for the acquisition of knowledge; and that even the same individuals possess this aptitude in a very varying degree at different times, and under changed circumstances: and there is a corres-



ponding difference in the wear and tear of brainular energy. This is great in proportion to the difficulty of pursuit ; and it would be well, if the class of literary giants would select for themselves appropriate objects of pursuit ; while they who possess a smaller intellectual stature should invariably lay aside for a time, the subject on which they are obliged to concentrate an amount of brainular power, which the organ is incapable of affording without injury. It may be fearlessly asserted, that where wearisomeness begins, energy terminates ; and that thought which is elaborated afterwards, will bear the impress of obtuseness, which no subsequent retouching will ever effectually remove. In addition to the injury sustained by the brain, when compelling it to work against its inclination, a great deal of time is lost, which would really be saved if the work were thrown aside at once, and resumed under happier auspices, when the cerebral energies had been recruited.

In his relation to literature, man must be estimated by considering his double attribute of physical and intellectual life ; for each is so dependent upon the other, that the integrity of both is necessary to their mutual harmony.

The actions of physical life consist, for the most part, in the functions of digestion, assimilation, nutrition, circulation, respiration, secretion, excretion, absorption, locomotion, sensation. Health is dependent upon the harmonious operation of these functions, when no one is excessive or defective, but each quietly performs its due proportion of the work in the animal economy. Disease is more or less present whenever there occurs *any* deviation from this harmony: and this deviation *must* happen unless these functions get their regular supply of nervous influence, which they *cannot do* if too much be expended upon intellectual life.

Intellectual life may be said to consist of perception, attention, comparison, judgment, reason, memory, imagination, thought, the affections and passions, &c. As in physical life, so here, health consists in the harmonious play, and subordination of all these agencies to *the master mind behind*. Disease, or rather disorder, exists whenever this perfect harmony is dissolved; and organic disease is produced, if this state continue so long as to leave behind traces of permanent injury.

Now there is this remarkable difference be-



tween physical and intellectual life, that whereas all the functions of the *former* are distributed over the system to *various appointed organs*, all the *not less complicated functions of the latter* are to be performed by *one organ* ; and further, not only has this organ, the brain, to support its own peculiar operations, but it has to furnish the means of support, of sympathy, and of harmony to all the organs and functions of physical life. If, by accident, any one of these organs be cut off from its communication with the brain, its function instantly ceases. And, moreover, the disorder of any one of these links in the chain of organic life, is *reflected back upon the brain*, and *it* is thus placed in a position unfavourable to the healthy continuance of any of its functions : so that it will be seen, this organ has far more to do, and is far more liable to the causes of disorder, than any other in the body.

Again, a certain degree of *physical power* is absolutely necessary to the useful employment of the faculties of the understanding : it will always be found that brainular power is greatest, *cæteris paribus*, where it has not been *early* stimulated into action ; and that precocious ex-

ertion is almost always followed by *feebleness*, and sometimes by *absolute loss* of capacity. For it is not in intellectual as it is in physical life, that exercise develops power. In the one instance, call any peculiar set of muscles into action, very frequently, or very energetically, and there will be a proportionate growth of muscular fibre, so that power and action go hand in hand :—not so with regard to *nervous fibre* ; employ it *beyond a certain point*, and it will lose power, while its irritability will be increased, and likewise its tendency to disorder.

In this instance, therefore, power and action no longer go hand in hand ; but the latter diminishes, and ultimately destroys the former. It may, perhaps, be asserted, that the brain *does* acquire more power by exercise, and that facts prove the foregoing reasoning to be erroneous. But the truth is, that this *is not a fact*, and that *the brain really loses power*, though by its *increasing aptitude for certain employments* it *appears to gain power* ; only because less exertion is required to accomplish the same object ; and, therefore, there is less *apparent show of power*.

Again, every organ of the body must have its

period of repose, longer or shorter, according to circumstances : none can go on well unless it obtain its allotted portion ; and the brain is one of those organs which requires for its restoration a long period of quiet. The literary man, for the most part, does not consider there is *any necessity* for attention to his brain, till it ceases, perhaps all at once, to yield him its customary obedience. He is for ever engaged in a constant struggle against sleep, and mournfully deploras the interruption occasioned to his studies by this “ tired Nature’s sweet restorer,” against whose influence therefore he wages perpetual warfare.

The effect of this struggle is *always* unfortunate ; if successful, by the aid of powerful volition, or of some medicinal agent, to be mentioned hereafter, the brain carries on its actions at the expense of its vital power ; and if the contrary, there occurs heavy, congestive, unnatural sleep, and a state of hebetude or of morbid irritability is the result ; the organ is now over-goaded, and the individual borders upon that state of disorder which we shall presently describe. If this were only an *occasional* over-excitement, it would be followed by a state of



temporary collapse, and the equilibrium would be restored; but when it is constantly happening, a demand is made upon the constitution, which impairs its vital power, and which is felt upon the brain itself, or upon one of the important organs depending upon it for support, according as the one or the other may be the feeble organ, or the most predisposed to disease.

It might perhaps be supposed, that the man of the world, the man who mixed much in society, and was himself mixed up with all its turmoils, and follies, and impertinences, and provocatives of every kind, would equally suffer from over-excitement of the brain. And he may do so, but the stimulation is of a very different character: the one is superficial, the other deep-seated: the one resting upon the surface of action and passion, the other having its chosen seat in the centre of thought and feeling. In this case, that close abstraction from external objects, that isolation of desire, that introversion of himself, that struggling of imagination which seeks to carry thought and reasoning one step beyond the present defined boundaries of knowledge, and to call up the creations of genius:

these are the attributes of the literary man, who is always at work : in his study or out of it, wherever he may be, the mind is engaged ; and during his waking and sleeping hours, there is one unvarying character given to all he says and does ; and this cannot go on without producing some of the evil effects arising from brainular over-action.

Another evil frequently operating upon the literary man, in producing disease, is the influence of moral affections. It is too frequently the truth, that poverty is his appointed lot, with all the evils of which it is the prolific source. Generally, each individual forms a pretty just estimate of his own weight in literary society : he finds himself surrounded by competitors for fame of the same mental calibre with himself ; and he hopes, by a little *more industry and exertion*, to step beyond his compeers, and to obtain a higher niche in the temple of fame : he is then *ambitious*, and, as too often happens in this evil world, he will find some more fortunate, or better connected, or worse principled individual, with less power, and less industry, outstrip him notwithstanding, in the chase, by the aid of the favouring gale of patronage. He is left behind, his hopes are



blasted; *disappointed ambition* sits upon his brow, and poisons all his real comforts: he is keenly alive to the injustice of the world, and suffers from the bitterness of neglect; he is constantly assailed by the cool selfishness of his compeers; he is maddened to jealousy by the triumph of competitors, and tormented by the fallacious hope of would-be friends and patrons. Envy is the canker of the soul; and thus driven by conflicting passions, he becomes the sport of morbid impulses, all of which impair, more or less, the energy of the brain, and *predispose it to morbid action*.

Some circumstance, apparently accidental, occurs, and occasions (proves *the exciting* cause of) the loss of the balance of health; that is, it has been getting lower and lower, till it can be borne no longer, and then come loss of vascular equilibrium, and disturbance of nervous agency.

First, loss of vascular balance. This happens, simply because there must be *increased arterial action*, to meet the increasing demand for the production of nervous energy; and then, if the system be one of high action with a tolerable amount of power, irritation, headach, more or

less of inflammatory action, will be the consequence. But if, as is too generally the case with literary men, the constitution has been enfeebled by a long course of devotion to study, the veins will not return this inordinate supply of blood so fast as they receive it, and venous fulness, congestion, &c., will be the result.

Secondly, The supply of nervous influence is disturbed : when the brain is so constantly overgoaded, it is accumulated in that organ, for intellectual purposes, not distributed in just proportion throughout the system ; and the effect is shewn upon the manifestations of mind, and upon the various actions of the bodily economy.

*a.* Upon the manifestations of mind. There is a very marked alteration in the capacity for devoting attention to any given object ; hence pursuit becomes desultory and uncertain ; the individual retires jaded and exhausted, to feverish rest ; he passes a night of dreams and horrors ; he awakens unrefreshed ; he takes a sombre view of futurity : before, courageous, and capable of sustaining the ills of life with equanimity, he becomes feeble and desponding : before, mild and cheerful and accessible, he becomes irritable, triste, silent, apt

to misconstrue intended kindnesses for some very opposite design : before, benevolent, and always trying to think the best of mankind, he now becomes morose and misanthropic : the darkening shades of bodily infirmity soon convert him into the hypochondriac, if they do not produce a less harmless form of insanity.

*b.* The various actions of the bodily system suffer. There follow great feebleness of muscular power ; a perversion, and even a very remarkable deviation from healthy sensation, as well as a loss of that organic sensibility which enables each organ to respond properly to the notices it receives, of the necessity for the exertion of its peculiar function.

To this cause may be traced all the dyspeptic symptoms, all the torpid action of the liver, all the disordered function of the heart, all the sluggish bowels, all the errors and deficiencies of the nutritive life ; and these evils all arising, not from *sympathy* with an overstrained brain, but really because the respective organs *cannot obtain the requisite supply of nervous energy*, to enable them to carry on their functions.

And now these organs, having themselves be-



come centres of morbid sensation, throw back their irritation upon the brain, and again originate *sources* of increasing discomfort. Thus acting and reacting upon each other, the balance of health, if not timely restored, may be irretrievably lost. It is all important to keep steadily in view, that the stomach symptoms of literary persons originate with the brain, and can only be properly and successfully treated by giving repose to that organ, and regulating its future movements. It is quite unavailing to prescribe for the effects, if the *primary cause* be overlooked. It is very common for such sufferers to have recourse to blue pill, to correct bile; to soda, to counteract acidity; to tonics, in various forms, to supersede a state of chronic irritation of the stomach; and perhaps to all these interchangeably. Let it only be remembered that these are not innocent remedies: that in very many instances they will do harm, first, by their immediate agency upon the *secondarily disordered* mucous membranes; and, secondly, by calling off the attention from the true source of malady: while in *all cases* they will be *useless*, because the

extent of their possible good is to *relieve a symptom*, and not to dissipate its cause.

It is then a matter of the greatest moment, to attend to the *earliest indications* of morbid action. Unfortunately, however, man's habit is, not to believe himself ill till he is absolutely stopped in his career, by the impossibility of proceeding. I would not contend for that overweening care, which is watchful of every breeze, solicitous for every moment, and afraid of every symptom, real and imaginary. This is, in itself, a symptom of disease ; the brain has lost its integrity of function, and is resting upon that undefined border-territory, which separates the manifestations of sound mind from insanity. But I must again impress upon my literary friends the necessity for attending to the early symptoms of morbid brainular action. And how is this to be effected ? How is it to be known ? How far may we proceed with impunity ? The question is simply and easily answered :—as soon as the individual becomes *conscious* that *the brain is at work*, so soon has he passed the boundary of health, and entered the confines of malady ; every instant the organ is becoming more and more



unfit for intellectual exertion ; morbid physical action has commenced ; and if allowed to proceed uncontrolled, none can calculate where it may be arrested.

It is not the intention of this essay to enter upon the treatment of cerebral disease, but only to point out its danger, and to show the means by which may be secured the largest amount of intellectual exertion, with the least possible injury to the physical and mental powers.

Attention to the following admonitions will best promote these objects :—

First, Seek after contentment and cheerfulness. Where there is a happy state of mind ; where things go smoothly, and a halo of gladness and of comfort surrounds and invests the prospect of futurity, and the present path is easy and agreeable, then all goes well : labour is a pleasure, and fatigue is a stranger. But if there be an unhappy and irritable state of mind ; if circumstances proceed perversely, and little unforeseen, and easily avoidable difficulties cross the path, then the very same labour is exhausting, and we soon learn the infirmity which cleaves to our most active duties.

Secondly, Introduce *order* into all your pur-

suits : without this, intellectual labour will be desultory and unavailing, and will soon occasion that feeling of discontent which forms an unconquerable barrier to successful study. Let time be methodically divided, so that each section of the day shall bring with it its peculiar and allotted arrangement.

Thirdly, Be especially watchful over the *passions* : nothing can be more hurtful than the excitement they produce, both to present study, and to the capacity of the brain for receiving knowledge, or taking up and carrying on its investigations.

Fourthly, Secure a frequent intermission and change of employment. The brain cannot long sustain the *unvarying* tension to which it is wrought up, without serious injury ; but may be carried forward in active exertion for a considerable time, merely by change of object : for such is the constitution of this organ, that a *change* in the direction of its attention is rest. Perhaps a different set of nervous fibres are employed, or an altered mode of action is set up in the brain, so as to give an entirely new energy to its operations,

and to save it from that fatigue which only precedes exhaustion by a very short interval.

Fifthly, Cultivate friendly and relative society. It is of the very first importance to avoid that isolation of feeling, that concentration of thought and action, which so frequently attend upon the literary devotee, from the nature of his pursuits, and the little sympathy that others show towards him : and in order to accomplish this, let the connecting links with society be kept clear and distinct ; let the social affections be developed, and these will tend, more than any other observance, to preserve him from evil : in fact, the exercise of the *affective*, will relieve the burden of the *intellectual faculties*.

Sixthly, In order to fulfil the same indication to which all these directions point,—that is, to take off from the brain the tension of uniform and exclusive pursuit,—let a certain portion of each day be allotted to *bodily exercise*. No time will be ultimately lost from this suspension of labour ; since by it the health will be preserved, the tone of the cerebral fibre will be sustained, and the brain will be able to accomplish more, far more,



in a given time, than it would have been capable of doing in a much longer period than that which would be constituted by the superaddition of time devoted to this important precaution.

Seventhly, Let a due proportion of hours be allotted to sleep. It is quite impossible to define the limits of sleep, because one brain requires a very much longer period to recruit itself than another, to all appearance similarly constituted. The only rule, therefore, must be *relative*: the time for repose must be long enough to restore the *exhaustion*, but not long enough to *produce congestion* in that organ. The individual should awaken, light, comfortable, refreshed, with the brain enabled at once to resume its labours with activity and fruitfulness. To afford the best means of securing this desirable object, sleep should always be taken on a horsehair mattress, with a pillow of the same material, only lightly shaken into its case, *without any*, or *with a very thin* night-cap. The head should be raised only just so much as thoroughly to fill up the difference between the plane of the shoulder and that formed by the side of the head. It is a very mis

taken idea that the head should be *much* raised during sleep, with individuals whose brain is predisposed to high action. It is all very well, as long as the party is awake ; but as soon as consciousness and volition are suspended by the invasion of sleep, the head falls forward upon the neck, and the *return of blood from* the head is greatly impeded.

A very important caution is, never to go to bed *direct* from the labour of *composition* ; because the transition is too great, and the vascular balance is thereby destroyed. Night is commonly the literary labourer's best hour ; but then the arterial system is excited ; and if in this state of excitement he retires to rest, the consequence is a difficulty in the action of the returning vessels, which produces, first, sluggishness, then congestion, and from this, torpor, and many a fearful evil. Before the act of retiring, the pen should be thrown aside ; some work which does not require much thought or attention, should be taken up, till this excitement has given way to the approach of sleepiness ; and *then*, to bed with safety and advantage.



Eighthly, The agency of air upon the animal economy is not to be forgotten ; particularly with regard to its pressure, its purity, and its temperature.

Its pressure.—A moment's reflection will be sufficient to show, that when the atmospherical pressure is high, we feel comfortable, elastic, because supported ; and that with a low barometer, we feel dull and heavy, from the absence of this support. This vigour on the one hand, and inertness on the other, are extended to the functions of organic life. The venous circulation is quickened or rendered sluggish by this varying state ; so that *all* the organs suffer from the want of sufficient pressure ; but especially the brain, from the embarrassment of its venous circulation, and from another *immediate* agency exerted upon the sentient extremities of the nerves. Hence a high pressure of the atmosphere is favourable to intellectual labours.

Its purity.—It is of great consequence to ensure an abundance of pure air : for while intellectual exertion is going on, a regular supply of *highly oxygenized blood* must be sent to the brain, or it cannot support the function it is

called upon to perform, and this cannot be obtained without pure air.

Its temperature.—The library should be neither cold nor hot ; for during active thought, the caloric function is impaired ; and at the same time, if the temperature be too high, not only is a feverish state produced, but a languor of thought is occasioned, which is most oppressive. There is no fixing an arbitrary degree of temperature, so great is the difference of *individual sensation*. That, however, which is rather cool than hot is to be preferred ; while that which keeps the student *comfortable* is to be the criterion. There can be no effectual study going forward, if either extreme be present. The best method of airing the library will be to keep a fire burning, whenever a fire can be required ; and to secure the escape of the *contaminated* air from the top of the room ; and this will necessarily occasion a good supply of pure fresh air.

Ninthly, One word on the subject of clothing. The literary man is generally chilly. In consequence of having so large a quantity of blood determined to the organs of interior life, and especially to the brain ; and also, because the

interior mucous membrane of the alimentary canal is generally in a feeble state; the circulation of the extreme vessels, is commonly weak, and the quantity of caloric evolved is insufficient. Hence the importance of wearing a good non-conductor of heat, especially since, from the cause just specified, he must be highly susceptible of the infinitely varied vicissitudes of our climate; and therefore particularly liable to disorder arising from their impression. It must be remembered too, that these impressions are felt more by those who lead sedentary lives, than by those who are constantly and habitually exposed to their influence. Let, therefore, flannel be worn next the body; and whether within or without doors, let that body be preserved *comfortably warm*—a criterion far better than can be given by any *absolute* and unchanging standard: at the same time it may be remarked, as a general rule, that a temperature of about 64° Fahrenheit, will be the most agreeable.

The hard student is very subject to cold feet: let this be guarded against rather by non-conductors of heat around the feet and legs, than by the application of artificial warmth, chaufferettes,



&c. &c. The reason is obvious; in the one case the constitution is assisted to maintain its own heat; in the other, warmth is imparted, which is very soon lost, and the real state of the circulation falls back to precisely where it was before.

The warm bath and the hot foot-bath, are objectionable, on account of their reflex influence upon the head: if either be employed, except very occasionally, it should always be with the precaution of applying cold to the head at the same time. The man of letters should be specially careful to keep up the capillary circulation of the skin; and it will be with him a most important precaution, if he employ cold ablution daily, *a capite ad calcem*, and dry friction, with a moderately coarse napkin afterwards. The head should be indulged with a liberal allowance of cold water, both night and morning. This direction, however, presupposes the vascular system to be in a state of considerable energy; because if there be any degree of congestion about the veins, or torpor of the brain, the sedative influence of cold thus applied, will unquestionably tend to increase the existing predisposition. But if these precautions be attended to, the in-

creased *arterial action*, which precedes *venous congestion* will be kept within bounds, and then the state of *torpor* will be prevented.

Hard students are very generally addicted to late hours ; and they commonly feel that one hour in the stillness of night, is worth three of more intense study and application during the day : if, therefore, they must sit up, let it be done with the least possible injury ; and for this purpose every ligature, every button that can be untied or unbuttoned, should be set at liberty, in order to take off pressure, and leave the system as much as possible without incumbrance : this is particularly important as regards the neck and the lower extremities. Cravats and garters, or drawer-strings, are great enemies to the energy and well-being of the really literary Polyphemus.

Tenthly, A few words of caution with regard to regimen, must close this already too protracted essay :—

1. The energy of the stomach and bowels being impaired, they require attention ; for indigestion and constipation are the common inheritance of the hard student : and yet nothing will continue to go on well if these functions are

neglected. Let not the literatus hesitate to become a dietetic, or even a taker of medicine : let him recollect, that a little preventive care, is far better than the uncertain, though best directed *efforts to cure*. The bowels must be acted upon daily by the mildest aperients ; a little *dinner-pill*\* of rhubarb and aloes, if necessary, will generally answer best ; but let it be taken undeviatingly, and at the same hour of the day ; and by this means digestion will be improved. Perhaps it is not very important whether the pill be taken immediately before or after dinner ; but I am disposed to think its complete union with the food is more satisfactorily accomplished if taken at the latter period. Unless this regular action be secured, there will be no good health : the head will be sure to suffer, a nervous irritable state will be induced, and every mode of *mischief* will follow.

2. Digestion is naturally weakened by study ; and this feebleness is commonly increased by not giving it fair play. The student seems to think

\* Rhubarb, 3 grains ; aloes, 1 grain ; gum mastick, 1 grain ; water.



the hour devoted to eating, time thrown away or misemployed: and yet, so far from it, upon this is dependent that energy of the brain which will alone ensure efficient and successful action. Without good mastication, there cannot be good digestion; without sufficient time devoted to the repast, there cannot be sufficient mastication; consequently a considerable period should be given to the principal meal; and this will ultimately be found to be the best economy; for the energy of the brain will be recruited, and it will be enabled in the evening to take up its work with proper activity. After the chief meal, the nervous influence should be suffered to accumulate about the stomach, and a state of perfect quiescence should be observed; or if it must be so, a light work of no great interest should be taken up. Morning and evening, and especially in the winter season, are the best times for successful study.

3. Diet.—Different kinds of diet are suited to different climates, habits, and individuals: each should notice his peculiarities, shun whatever is injurious, and persevere in that which experience has taught to be useful. But without drawing a

universal line of demarcation, a few broad shades may be usefully thrown together ; for instance :—

Let the diet be always simple ; animal food under-dressed, roast in preference to boiled : let vegetables be very much dressed, and bread very much baked : sauces, made dishes, and pastry to be avoided, or taken very sparingly.

Water forms the best menstruum for digestion, when taken in small quantities, and *after* dinner ; but if one or two glasses of light wine be taken *with dinner*, no other fluid will be required ; and then a small cup of coffee, taken one hour afterwards, will be sufficient. When wine is not taken, really good table-beer will form an excellent substitute. Hard students will not bear a full, or stimulating diet.

When the stomach is feeble, and much disposed to acidity, sugar, in every shape, should be avoided as much as possible ; since an acid stomach and an energetic brain are perfectly incompatible.

Fluids in large quantities should be proscribed, from their tendency to weaken the stomach, and fill the vessels, not with a useful and nutritious, but with a *poor blood*, which tends to produce *plethora from quantity*, and so, indirect de-

bility, while it deprives the brain of that highly animalised blood, which is essential to its energy and activity.

The influence of tea and coffee upon the system, respectively, has engaged much of my thoughts. That these are useful to literary men, none will deny, and almost all will warmly assert; but what is it that constitutes the difference in their effect upon different persons? Why is it that one prefers tea, and another coffee? Why is it, that upon one person, coffee produces a feverish heat, a dry skin, and general discomfort, while tea enlivens, cheers, and strengthens? \* And again, why is it that upon another *tea* always produces a depressing influence, agitates the nerves, occasions palpitation of the heart, and a nameless distress which unfits him for active duty; while *coffee* sets him up, produces comfortable sensation, and enables him to go on cheerfully?

\* “ I puer, i, Theam confestim in pocula misce;  
 “ Urget non solitus lumina nostra sopor,  
 “ Mens stupet; obtusæ languent in corpore vires;  
 “ Languorem solvet vivida Thea novum.”

*Huetii Commentarius de Rebus ad eum Pertinentibus*, p. 304.  
 See also, Essay on Green Tea, by W. Newnham, Esq.



After very much of consideration, I am disposed to account for this difference in the following way:—I incline to believe, that the agency of these two substances upon the nervous system is very much alike, communicating a degree of douce excitement to that system; but that their influence upon the blood-vessels is dissimilar—the one quickening, the other lowering the action of the circulation. Thus, where there is considerable arterial action of the brain, and the circulation may be said to partake of the hypersthenic character, tea, by its sedative influence, induces a calm, not to be described; while coffee, being a purer excitant, increases action, gives a dry skin, and produces a temporary febrile movement.

On the contrary, where the venous system predominates, and the cerebral circulation may be said to partake of the hyposthenic character, the impetus which the arterial circulation obtains from the pure excitement of coffee, is decidedly beneficial, while the sedative agency of tea is distressing, because *embarrassing*.

My hypothesis may be wrong; but as it seems to be borne out by facts, and is capable of reconciling discrepancies otherwise irreconcilable, I

am disposed to cling to it till disproved. The practical inference is, to take the one or the other, according to the predominance of one or other of these states ; only let me add a caution against employing either in excess.

Let me also add one word of caution, on the subject of less innocent excitants to brainular activity. It is well known that some persons employ alcoholic stimuli, and others opium, in order to make themselves up to high intellectual action. To all such let me say,—Instantly, energetically, uncompromisingly, abandon now and for ever such a habit, if you value life, if you value usefulness, if you value social character, if you value present happiness, if you value peace of mind, if you desire the continuance of intellectual power, if you would avoid all the miseries of a paralytic old age, and premature imbecility ; and if you would not plant the thorn of bitterest remorse, arising from reflection on intellectual power abused, and talent relentlessly destroyed, on the pillow of sickness and the bed of death. And to all those who might in future be tempted to have recourse to similar means, let me say,—Avoid it as your deadliest foe—the implacable enemy to

usefulness, to vigour, to health of body and peace of mind, to all that intellectual men should hold most dear,—and even to life itself.

With the materials before me, this Essay might have been almost indefinitely enlarged, especially by illustrations and examples, drawn from the history of learned men in all ages ; but my desire has been to concentrate rather than to amplify, and to select from those materials such points of practical utility as might be really acceptable to my fellow-members of the Royal Society of Literature.

THE END.